US-India CEO Forum

1085. SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT. Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

the mandate given to US-India CEO forum. Sector-wise;

whether it covers even the policy matters like judicial reform, giving 'freehand' to private institutions to fix fee, review of copyright act, energy security, *sub judice* case of Bhopal gas tragedy in Supreme Court etc.;

if so, the reasons therefor;

whether corporate interest of a few US investors are being given an institutional framework through this forum; and

the steps taken by Government to ensure that the forum functions within the constitutional propriety?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) The India-US CEO Forum, whose activities are coordinated through the institutions of the Confederation of Indian industry (CII) and the US India Business Council (USIBC), is a forum in which the private sector representatives of the two countries interact and also discuss their input to the annual India-US Economic Dialogue, a Govemment-to-Govemment interface, for strengthening bilateral trade and economic linkages between the two countries.

(d)No.

(e) Does not arise.

PM's Visit to Russia

1086. SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRA SEKHAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

whether any new agreements have been signed and the existing ones updated between India and Russia during Prime Minister's recent visit to Russia; and

if so, the details thereof, agreement-wise?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERN ALAFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes. The following agreements/documents were signed during the Prime Minister's visit to Russia on 11 -12 November, 2007 to enhance cooperation in respective fields: (i) Agreement on cooperation in development and production of multi role transport aircraft; (ii) Agreement on cooperation to combat illicit trafficking in narcotics, psychotropic substances and their precursors; (iii) Agreement on cooperation in the field of joint moon exploration; (iv) Letters of Exchange for utilizing rupee debt funds for Russian investments in India.

Passports/Visas to Indians Abroad

1087. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that several Indians living abroad for years are not being issued visas and passports by the concerned Indian Embassies and High Commissions, to return to India;

the number of such affected Indians;

whether Government is tailing any steps to provide the necessary facilities to the affected Indians so that they come to India; and

if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED):(a)and(b)No.

(c) and (d) Passport facilities are provided to Indian citizens by our Missions abroad expeditiously after completion of the prescribed procedures. Indian nationals living abroad do not require a visa to return to India. Persons of Indian Origin with a foreign nationality are granted visas expeditiously in keeping with the relevant norms.

Guidelines for Issuing passports

1088. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

whether it is a fact that Government is considering to revise the guideline for issuing passport;

if so, the details thereof;

to what extent it would help for issuing passports faster; and

the average time taken presently to issue passports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) The Government had entrusted the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG), Hyderabad with the task of undertakings a time-bound study on the passport issuance system, including its IT aspects with the objective to *deliver passport related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner* NISG has submitted its report, which has been accepted by the Government it has been decided to launch "Passport Seva Project".

The proposal is to have 68 Passport Facilitation Centres all over the country where the non-sovereign functions, involved in the passport issuance process, such as initial scrutiny of the application forms, acceptance of fee, scanning of the documents, taking photos, etc. will be done by the service provider to be selected through an open bidding process. The Government staff at the Passport Facilitation Centres will verify the documents and decide on granting of Passport. The other activities such as printing and dispatch will also be done by the Government staff. Police verification will be expedited through electronic linkage of the Passport Facilitation Centres with the police authorities in State Capitals.

(c) and (d) The Project is expected to result in the issue of passports within 3 days and in cases, which require police verification, within 3 days after the completion of the verification process. Average time presently taken to issue passports is 45 days and for re-issue 15 days.